



DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
ACTION MEMORANDUM

S/S

February 22, 1975

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To: The Secretary  
Through: P - Mr. Sisco  
From: AF - Edward W. Mulcahy, Acting

Reply to Ethiopian Request  
for Emergency Resupply of Ammunition

PROBLEM

You asked at your staff meeting February 21 for our views on our response to the Ethiopian Government's urgent request for replenishment of its ammunition stocks for use in the ongoing war against the Eritrean insurgents. In order to avoid incremental decision-making, which could inadvertently move us in an unintended direction, we examine the problem here in its medium-term context. We urge that the decision on replenishment not be made without consideration of other related issues, which are discussed in the attached paper (Tab A). This paper has been cleared by the interested agencies and offices and could serve as the basis for a review in the WSAG framework. We recommend that a meeting of the WSAG be called early next week.

BACKGROUND

Since 1962, when Eritrea's federal status was ended, an insurgency has been going on in Eritrea. The insurgency sputtered along for years at a low level, but never seriously threatened Ethiopian control of that province. We kept ourselves uninvolved.

Upon the deposition of Haile Selassie in 1974, General Aman, a widely respected Eritrean, assumed power. His policy of detente and negotiation raised hopes among the Eritreans that a reconciliation with Ethiopia might be found. These hopes were shattered when Aman was killed by the present military leaders. Because of the distrust of the new regime by the Eritrean population plus the heavy subsidies and arms

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supply to the PLF/ELF by several Arab states, the insurrection has escalated. Heavy fighting broke out in Asmara between the ELF guerrillas and Ethiopian troops on January 31, and sporadic conflict has continued since then. DIA estimates that neither side will win. The Ethiopian army will maintain control of the cities; and the ELF, the countryside. This study is based on this fundamental assumption. Moreover, the fighting could lead to uprisings in other parts of Ethiopia by those opposed to the PMAC's radical social policies and/or those who favor autonomy.

As anticipated, the Ethiopian Government asked us on February 15 for a massive resupply of ammunition to be used in the continuing hostilities in Eritrea.

#### THE DILEMMA

The basic question is whether it remains in our interest to continue to support the present government and Ethiopia's territorial integrity in a situation where the country may be breaking apart.

The more immediate question is how to respond to an urgent request for up to \$30 million worth of ammunition, much of which we do not believe is immediately required, and shipment of which would be highly conspicuous and controversial.

On the one hand, we have been virtually the sole support of the Ethiopian military since 1953. During these years our close relationship with the friendly Haile Selassie regime paid dividends to us both militarily (Mogadishu Station, access to ports and airfields, overflight rights, etc.) and politically (Haile Selassie's moderating influence in African and world councils). More than two decades of US-Ethiopian military cooperation and economic assistance have resulted in a US "investment" in Ethiopia that is worth preserving if possible. Moreover, the black African states do not want to see the disintegration of Ethiopia and would be very critical of us if we were to withdraw our support from that government at this crucial time. Finally, U.S. interests in Ethiopia derive from its location along the southern periphery of the Middle East, the anticipated opening of the Suez Canal and the importance of limiting USSR, PRC and radical Arab penetration and influence in that area. The most strategically located section of Ethiopia, however, is Eritrea.

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PA/HO Department of State

E.O. 12958, as amended

May 4, 2006

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Should Eritrea become independent, in spite of our support of Ethiopia, we would have no influence whatever in the new state. Our ships would no longer have access to the ports of Massawa and Assab, and the Red Sea would be virtually an Arab lake. More immediately, the ELF/PLF would look upon us as an enemy and all Americans in Eritrea would be in jeopardy and many (excluding Consulate General personnel) would have to be removed immediately. On the home front continued support of one side in what is virtually a civil war undoubtedly involving repeated violations of human rights would come under increasing attack from the Congress and the domestic press. Finally, the basic attitude of the present military leadership toward the U.S. under more normal circumstances is not really known, even though they have said that they want to maintain the traditional close ties with us.

#### OPTIONS

Unlimited support without conditions. We would be forthcoming in responding to Ethiopia's requests for security assistance. This option is predicated on the assessment that the PMAC can, with US support, reduce the insurgency to manageable proportions without offering major concessions to the Eritreans, and that by clearly signalling to the PMAC and its adversaries that the US is standing by the Government of Ethiopia, we can avert the fragmentation of Ethiopia. It also assumes that any political dissolution of Ethiopia attributable to US non-support would be seen in African eyes as a major defeat for US policy in Africa.

Limited Responsiveness. We would continue our on-going programs but scale down the size and profile of the ammunition replenishment request, while encouraging moderation and reconciliation in Eritrea. We consider the ammunition replenishment request, which amounts to around \$30 million, excluding transportation costs, to be exorbitant.

Conditional Support. We would agree to a limited and inconspicuous emergency resupply but only if the PMAC is willing to ensure the protection of human rights and to commit itself to negotiations toward autonomy for Eritrea within a federal framework, as existed prior to 1962.

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Withdrawal of support. We would refuse the PMAC resupply request and suspend arms deliveries as long as the fighting in Eritrea continued. This option is premised on the belief that US interests, both internationally and domestically, would best be served by avoiding the risks of becoming involved with an unstable regime engaged in what is likely to be a messy and protracted struggle in which neither side can achieve a military victory.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

We favor minimal resupply effort necessary to keep open our several options with the Ethiopians pending the evolution of events. The resupply would involve essentially cash purchases. To keep shipments as inconspicuous as possible we propose using surface transportation primarily supplemented by commercial flights and the regular weekly Military Air Command flights to Addis Ababa. We suggest that we be prepared to bring ammunition levels up to the customary reserve stocks which existed at the time the present fighting broke out. We are presently awaiting better information from DOD and MAAG as to types and quantities of ammunition and costs.

Any resupply should be coupled with an attempt to exert influence to get both the Ethiopians and the other side to move the situation toward a sensible cease-fire and negotiations. We are in the best position to influence the Ethiopians. At the same time we would ask key Arab states (Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt) to urge the ELF/PLF to adopt a similar course.

We should make clear to the Eritreans through the Arabs that we have no intention of becoming involved in the internal struggle, but that our action in providing minimal supplies is supportive of getting the negotiating process started.

It is important to stress the negotiations aspect not only to try to get movement started in the direction of peaceful settlement but to prevent the problem from being perceived as an Arab-Israeli or an East-West conflict. Moreover, this will be important in our explanation of our Ethiopian policy to the Congress and the press. Several Congressmen have already asked for a briefing on Ethiopia by the Department.

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Any decision to replenish ammunition supplies would create too high a risk for continued Kagnew operations. Any resupply, therefore, should be preceded by a decision to close the remaining Kagnew installations, evacuating from Asmara all Americans except a stripped-down Consulate General staff.

Drafted: *WBC*  
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2/22/75

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